

The Motives for Communism

How It Worked and What It Led To

Josiah Warren

1872-73

Contents

COMMUNISM	3
Article I	4
Article II	5
Article III	7
Article IV	8
Article V	10
Article VI	12
Article VII	14
The Model Schools	14
Article VIII	16
Article IX	18
Article X	20
Article XI	21

COMMUNISM

Mesdames Editors: How often have I said to myself, "Oh, for a paper of world-wide circulation, through which we could pour into the public lap the most important results of our lives' experience! That others who come after us may avoid the thorny paths that have lacerated our feet—may profit by our errors and successes. I hope and believe that your is, or will be, such a paper: and in it I propose to furnish a series of articles, showing the practical workings of Communism and other reform experiments running through the forty-six years devoted to peaceful social revolution; and it will be seen that some facts are more strange than fiction, more philosophical than philosophy, more romantic than romance and more conservative than conservatism.

Article I

When Robert Owen came to this country in 1825 I listened to some of his sublime discourses and read some of his publications, from which it appeared that, unless some peaceful revolution could be devised, the working classes, driven to starvation by machinery and destructive competition between themselves, would be compelled to choose between death by destitution and an effort to save themselves by violent revolution.

He showed us that in Communism, instead of working against each other as in competition, we should all work for each other while working for ourselves. A problem that had been profoundly considered by the wisest of our race, but which had always baffled the highest stretch of genius. It appeared that mutual help would beget mutual sympathy, or social harmony. That labor would be reduced to two or three hours a day, leaving abundance of leisure for new enterprises and general improvement. That the jealousies and antagonisms between the poor and the rich would be at an end, and a fellow feeling would grow up from equality of condition. No more horrible crimes, or punishments still more horrible. No more children crying for bread. No more suicides for fear of starvation. No more drunkenness from despair. No more prostitution to escape starvation. No more wars about the profits in trade nor for the privileges of governing, for the government was to consist of all above a certain age. The business of nations would not be the destruction of each other, but a mutual interchange of services beneficial to each.

Sick at heart with the habitual contemplation of the frauds and cruelties of men toward each other, and the miseries in different forms that had surrounded me from childhood, all growing out of the crudity of our civilization, and seeing no hope of change, I had, at the age of 23, become willing to shut my eyes forever; but here was a new sun arisen! and my young and ardent spirit grasped at it as at the breath of life. Mr. Owen had become a new god to me, and I said to myself, now I have an object worth living for!

I was not alone in these views and feelings; several excellent people of rare intelligence and thoughtful habits joined in a project to start a community in the neighborhood of Cincinnati.

The next article will show how it worked.

I would gladly avoid the imputation of egotism, but for the sake of giving definite responsibility, and as simple truth works better than anything short of it, and to put myself in communication with readers, I give my name and place of residence.

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

Article II

Some facts are more strange than fiction, more philosophical than philosophy, more romantic than romance and more conservative than conservatism.

In my previous article I spoke of some of the motives for communism; and, certainly, no higher or more holy motive can possibly actuate human beings. We now come to the way it worked.

We had assembled with a view of organizing a community, as I said, in the vicinity of Cincinnati. We were in the best of humor with each other, and expectations ran high. After a little preliminary conversation, the idea of organizing a meeting came up; but who should call us to "order?" No one felt "authorized" to do it, and each one seemed to feel a modest objection to assume authority. At last, one seemed to think that, if anything was done, somebody must do it, and he modestly laid aside his modesty and "called the meeting to order," and proposed the appointment of a chairman. Of course, no one objected, and chairman was appointed, not without some embarrassment in selecting one for "the honor of presiding" where all were admitted to be equally entitled to it.

The first subject proposed for consideration was a name for the contemplated community. One proposed "the practical Christians." Another objected that there were some very good Jews with us, and he hoped there would be many; not only so, but this movement was, we hoped, to become world-wide, including all beliefs and all non-beliefs in natural co-operation and harmonious feeling; and it would seem contrary to this all-embracing brotherly spirit to adopt a name that would imply anything like sectism or tend to divide us into insiders and outsiders. He said, it pained him to be obliged to say any thing adverse to what the brother had proposed, for we look for perfect "unity" in this movement. The other replied that we need not look for unity till all were willing "to stand up for Jesus." This is the first dash of cold water upon our kindling enthusiasm, and it was felt keenly by several who endeavored to allay the disturbed feeling by various remarks, all differing to some extent with each other; and the evening was spent without coming to any conclusion as to the name. If we came near to any one conclusion from the proceedings, I think it was not that "unity" that we had expected to see among us.

The next meeting was spent in a similar manner, but with the brotherly feeling somewhat diminished though no one could hardly acknowledge the fact to himself. At the next meeting we fortunately hit upon the experience of naming the community by the place of its locality, whatever that might eventually be. That being settled, the next thing was a constitution. A committee was appointed to draft one, at the meeting following, it was brought forward for acceptance. There were perhaps about thirty articles in it, and we found it impossible to agree on three of them that evening. In fact, we got into confusion. The chairman felt embarrassed, and the rest of us, (some at least) began to feel that this was not the "Unity" we had expected. Just in proportion as we desired to persevere this "unity" we hesitated to express conflicting opinions; some were consequently silent and their opinions were unknown even in regard to a measure with was to involve the whole life's destiny.

At this meeting I said “Friends, we have certainly committed some mistake somewhere: I do not know where it is: but if we were right, there would not be so much friction in our machinery. I will go down to New Harmony and join Mr. Owen’s Community. He knows how to do it. I will go to school to him; and when I have got the lessons I will report to you.”

[These friends went on and organized, and moved out about thirty miles from Cincinnati—failed within a year and returned to Cincinnati discouraged.]

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

Article III

I knew nothing then about Individuality. I had, indeed, heard that individual ownership was one of the great roots of human evil, and that Communism was to be the remedy. The idea of individuality being the germ of “intellectual anarchy” had not yet reached this country, where we were asleep like the man in the boat that was silently gliding over the cataract of Niagara. I had heard of the monarch who, in reply to a proposition to educate the people, said “he did not want learned opponents; he wanted obedient subjects.” There certainly can be no “intellectual anarchy” where there is no intellect. The monarch was right in his conclusions from his premises: if one mind is to govern millions, these millions must have no minds; but, like dried herrings on a stick, their intellectual eyes must be punched out, all life must be extinguished, and they must all be dried and fixed to one pattern. As I have said, knowing nothing about Individuality (as the great, supreme, divine^[1] law of order, progress and repose); I had plunged my hand into scalding water and suddenly withdrew it, and was now ready to plunge into it over head and ears.

I began to prepare for joining Mr. Owen at New Harmony, Indiana. Among my customers were some very good friends who endeavored to dissuade me from the contemplated step. One said, “Now, it isn’t possible, is it, that thee is going to break up thy nice, comfortable home and business, and risk all in an untried experiment that may disappoint thee at last?”

“O, my dear, sir, it is because is untried that it requires to be tried. I don’t fear that I shall ever want for business: and besides, in the present condition of things and people in general, life has no charms for me.”

“But, then, how can thee succeed, when thee knows that minds differ so much from each other, they cannot agree, and how can they walk together unless they be agreed?”

“O, my friend, we must yield these little difference for the great general good.”

“Well, I hope thee will not be disappointed, but I fear thee will.”

Several other friends went over just about the same ground with me, and though I fully appreciated their kindness I thought my replies ought (in view of the public good) to overbalance their objections. My wife, too, a most careful and judicious woman, was as much in favor of the movement as I was, and I began to sell off and give away some of the goods in the store, and send other notions to be sold at auction, let my house for a year, bought a “flat boat” and floated down the Ohio river, bag and baggage, and reached New Harmony about the first of May, 1825.

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

Article IV

We found New Harmony to be a clean, handsome village with substantial buildings, wood and brick, capable of housing about eight hundred people, most of whom had already arrived. There were very intelligent people from Philadelphia, Washington, London, Paris and other cities, all as enthusiastic as ourselves. Mr. Owen had purchased the whole of the Rappite community which had just left. In the town there was a woollen factory all in running order, a large grist mill, a little outside of town, twenty-eight hundred acres, I believe, of the best land well timbered. Mr. William McClure, a life-long philanthropist and “the father of geology in this country,” with millions of money all ready to embark in the movement, with an immense collection of apparatus for model industrial schools, with a set of Pestalozian teachers whom he had met and engaged in Europe, paying them salaries from the time they started and their passage across the Atlantic. A rare library of very scarce and valuable books, costing perhaps thirty thousand dollars. Mr. Owen had another and particularly a musical library, containing a copy of all the pieces that in London were thought worth having; and, what Mr. Owen playfully termed “a whole boat load of learning,” books without number on the sciences and professors to match. I give these particulars so that our failure can not be attributed to the common explanation, “want of means.”

We had a Constitution (of course) of perhaps about thirty articles, one of which was that all the members were to give their best services for the general interests; but we had no sooner sat down to the committee table and got a subject before us, than we found that we differed widely as to what would best promote the best interests of the society; and the more we talked, the more points of difference were raised (as usual) and we were obliged to leave the decision to Mr. Owen at last. Here was king and council at the very outset! This looked ominous, but I supposed it was the best that could be done in the crude state in which we found ourselves.

Everyone felt free to express any opinion he or she might entertain on any subject, without fear of a Bastille, or even of offence, and as there was a great deal of active intellect assembled there, and in dead earnest, upon subjects entirely untried, no wonder that we could scarcely find much “unity” of opinion on any subject that came up.

I am not now writing the history of the present time among Reformers, but of Communism in New Harmony in 1825. If one is a description of the other, the fact may help us in the end to a solution that will well pay for the study it may cost.

We could not get things into working order. The people, having no land of their own, could not set themselves to work, but must wait for orders from superintendent; and superintendents must be appointed by the committee, and the committee were not sufficiently familiar with the business to be done nor with the qualifications of persons for superintendents, and besides they were busy with other matters, equally embarrassing.

We now heard complaints of “idleness,”—a desire to “shun labor,”—but those complaints came from those who, having had an over share of labor their whole lives, very naturally would like to escape from it and have a little rest; never even suspecting that the subjects of their criticism wished above all things to be at work, not only for their own personal comfort, but for the sake of

the cause that had brought them there. It was almost impossible to believe one's eyes when they saw two eminent physicians right from their practices in Philadelphia, the one in the harvest field, in the hot July suns, week after week, and the other, a young and light framed man, rolling logs the whole day long, doing more than the share of one man, among those who had done such work all their lives.

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

Article V

Here we are, eight hundred of us, living mainly at Mr. Owens expense, at the rate of \$9,000 a month.

Economy was now the word, and the expenses of living were reduced to the lowest living rates. We had, as I said, a "Constitution, and this called for "Equality;" and one member who had not thought much upon such subjects, demanded an opportunity of keeping the public-house his share of the time, in order to get his share of the good things that were promised for visitors, and so persistent was he that a public meeting of the whole population (of legislative age) was called to give him a hearing, although it excited only laughter in some, and sadness in others, to see so noble an enterprise produce such results: but we had got a "Constitution" like all other Constitutions or rather, it had got us, for we were bound to carry out its requirements, however absurdly they might be interpreted; or else alter or abolish it. Very soon a meeting was called for public business, and it was proposed to alter the Constitution in several respects. Conflicting views consumed that evening without result, and the meeting was adjourned to the next day, and the next day was taken up in trying to make a "Constitution," instead of making food and clothing. After several days spent in this way, a great variety of subjects being agitated, the "Constitution was altered (if not amended) but the meetings and conflicting opinions consumed day after day and week after week, and led to dividing the society into three societies or departments—the agricultural, the mechanical, and the educational. Here was a step toward individuality; but it was thought best as a step out of, instead of into, "confusion and anarchy."

Mr. Owen, believing that a uniformity of dress would have a tendency to allay jealousies and envy, proposed that the women wear what was called the tunic (what is now called the bloomer dress) and that the men wear something similar while aiming in this way to produce a feeling of equality among ourselves, he did not seem to think of the other fact that while this might bring us nearer together in feeling, it would drive outsiders further from us, when our object was not to build up a sect, but by including all mankind in an effort for harmonious life, to abolish sectism and clanship. This was the first intimation I had that my new god might possibly prove to be human.

We now began to hear of the failures of several community experiments in this country, and that of Orbiston in Scotland, managed by Abraham Coombe, who, after superhuman effort and intense anxiety, died of exhaustion and a broken heart.

Discontents among ourselves now began to appear in the succession of ten or twelve families from us, and going by themselves out upon the unsettled lands, believing that they, at least, who thought and felt so nearly alike, could succeed, but in a few weeks they returned to the main town defeated, but could not seem to explain why they failed. Then another little company went out, and another and another—in all, from first to last, ten attempts of this kind were made, each very confident that if they only meant well they would surely succeed, but they all returned to the town disappointed. Now came the news of the failure of the "Valley Forge" community, and the Haverstraw, and others, but no explanation of the philosophy of these failures was heard.

Our expenditures were becoming alarming, when compared with the income. The charge of a desire to shun work was quite loud, and of course every remark of this kind was a very firebrand wherever it happened to fall. Mr. Owen proposed as a stimulus to industry, that each superintendent of a department should report his estimate of the workers under his direction, at the end of each week, at a public meeting. The working of this measure hardly needs illustration, perhaps, but I will give one. We had a young man there who had come all the way from Washington, (I believe), and who had been an apprentice to a jeweler. He was of a very delicate make and charmed even professional ears with his performances on the flute. He was in the agricultural department, and was ordered to go into the harvest field, and as might have been foreseen was reported as lowest, or almost or quite worthless. He was very sensitive and modest, and to see himself stamped all at once with such a reputation among us, seemed almost like a death blow to him. I felt deeply for him, for I loved him, but no words of sympathy and respect could restore his smile. We never heard his charming music again. We soon followed the first victim of our communistic criticism to his last resting place.

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

Article VI

We had organization after organization, constitution after constitution, and rules and regulations, only to abolish them and replace them with others only to be abolished in their turn. A large portion of our time, day and evening, was spent in legislation in general meetings or conversation in detail but the fruits of all this were only more compulsion and doubt as to our final success. Our confidence gradually gave place to anxiety, especially as some of the most intelligent began to leave.

Mr. McClure withdrew from the connection, and the ownership of the town was divided between him and Mr. Owen.

Here is an item of instruction. Two of the best men in the world, with exactly the same objects in view, could not act in communism together, but were compelled to go back to individuality for the sake of repose.

Mr. McClure then sustained the educational department with his own means, and he spent \$40,000 of his own money in three months, without anything to show for it (at least it was confidently so stated at the time).

One little incident will show how communism destroys harmony and friendship. In this department, one woman had been very low with a nervous fever several weeks, and shortly after she began to recover, some of the other women thought she was well enough to take her share in the washing and other house work, and continued to have this intimated to her husband; but his wife did not make her appearance in the kitchen, and some of the women agreed among themselves to confront the husband as he came out of the dining room, and to tell him in positive terms that they were for equality, and unless his wife came forward and did her part in the kitchen, they would leave it, and anybody might do the work that had a mind to. "Well," said the husband, "my wife will not come, at any rate, at present, let the consequences be whatever they may."

In two or three weeks after this, the department broke up, and having returned to individuality, there was nothing between the parties to dispute about.

All organizations had now failed; and we had so completely worn ourselves and each other out by increased legislation, that we could not talk any more on the subject that brought us together. The question then was, what is to be done? A public meeting was called, at which an intelligent gentleman from London (Mr. Whitwell) got up and said, "We have done nothing for the last six weeks but to meet here and make constitutions, laws, rules and regulations and to unmake them—It is now the middle of May and there is not a seed in the ground; and I propose that all of us immediately put ourselves under the direction of Mr. Owen for one year from this date." This was carried without a single word of debate or one dissenting voice.

Here we are, after having gone through every possible form of organization and government: we had arrived at anarchy, to be succeeded, as always, by despotism—that is, individuality in the deciding power: but it was individuality in the wrong form. It was the denial of the right of individuality in all except the ruler: this led to its inevitable consequences. In three weeks Mr.

Owen, though still the best of men, was as unpopular as he had before been beloved: do what he would no body was satisfied: and one man watched the streets a large portion of the time, declaring that his purpose was to meet Mr. Owen and fight him.

Some young men got a coffin and a flag inscribing on it "The Social System" with the intention of having a funeral the next day and burying the social system after parading it through the streets: but to save the feelings of Mr. Owen some one or more broke into the room where the preparations were, (the night previous to the intended funeral,) and destroyed them.

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

Article VII

Some facts are more strange than fiction, more philosophical than philosophy, more romantic than romance, and more conservative than conservation.

The Model Schools

I must not omit to describe the model schools, sustained by Mr. McClure. They were conducted by the pestalozzian teachers before mentioned. One was conducted in one wing of the large town hall. There was a partition separating this from the centre portion, where I was when my attention was arrested by a few words that I overheard addressed to a class of boys by Mr. Darusmont, a French gentleman, the conductor of this school. The thoughts presented to the public were so new, so sublime, and the language so charming, that I stood fascinated. I could not go about the business I went there for; but after having listened to the whole discourse, I resolved (though several years a married man) to beg of Mr. Darusmont the privilege of coming and sitting with his boys and listening to his teachings. I knocked at his door—he came—I made known my purpose—his handsome countenance lighted up and his eyes moistened with an evidently benevolent emotion, and taking my hand within both of his, he drew me within the door and gave me a welcome with a charming cordiality, in word, tone and gesture truly French. We immediately became fast friends.

The next day I took my seat with the boys, and for the first time in my life, I saw the true mission of education! No generalization that I can give will convey an adequate idea of the teachings of William Piquéal Darusmont, so careful was he to put forth the exact truth, and to see that it was thoroughly understood—so minutely analytical; so profoundly philosophical in the smallest particular—such nice discriminations where common eyes see no difference, but the want of which so often proves disastrous through life! With all this minuteness his discourse was not tiresome; and though addressed entirely to the intellect, the effect upon the feelings was like that of a masterly musical composition; which, by judicious changes of key and occasional digressions from the main theme, and then by natural and easy returns to it, with slight variations of expression, carries us, unconsciously wherever the author chooses.

I was speechless with admiration—reverence—love! When the sitting was over and the boys gone to their work, we had a long conversation (if that may be called conversation in which I could only listen). In this and subsequent interviews I learned that he had, early in life, resolved to devote himself to what he considered education should be. That he had been several years a friend and coadjutor of Pestalozzi. It seemed that one great idea with him was to draw out into exercise the self-sustaining faculties and thus qualify pupils to meet any contingencies of after life; and with this view he had experimented with himself in order to find out the extent of human capacities. He had learned several branches of mechanism—made a piano-forte from the raw materials, had gone all through the details of cooking food, washing and mending clothes,

as well as as cutting out and making them, and his pupils were now doing all these kinds of work for themselves.

He had remodeled the modes of almost every branch of civilization. He was the inventor of the instrument now used in many of the schools, viz, a frame with ten rods in it with ten balls on each for the better teaching of arithmetic; and he called it the "Arithmometer." In teaching geometry, instead of depending on words and lines, he had cubes, cones and every geometrical idea in wood, hanging up about the schoolroom or otherwise in plain sight. In teaching geography, each pupil had a little globe which he held in his hand to refer to. He had spent four years in one of the hospitals in Paris to qualify himself to speak intelligently upon anatomy and diseases, and he discoursed to us on those subjects using a pig for illustrations, as the animal nearest resembling the human structure. I also understood, (not from him) that he was a most thorough musical scholar, and an exquisite performer. He had also digested a system of universal phonography, representing all the elements of all languages.

In short, he seemed, like Lord Bacon, to have taken for his life-long pursuit, the study and promulgation of all useful knowledge, by the shortest and most thorough modes that could be devised; with the great leading idea that "there is nothing too large or too small for the greatest to engage in, which has a tendency to mitigate the pains, or promote the enjoyments of the humblest."

Since his death, I have learned that he belonged to the French nobility: but no hint of the kind ever escaped him in our interviews. With all his wonderful acquirements, his unaffected modesty was strikingly conspicuous.

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

Article VIII

As I before said, our experiments had come to an end. We had fairly worn each other out by incessant legislation about organizations, constitutions, laws and regulations, and we would no longer talk with each other on the subject that brought us there. We had tried every possible kind of organization and government, from political Democracy through every modification and mixture of all known political elements to anarchy, and then, of course, to despotism, and then, of course, to revolt—the old routine over again, excepting that we did not quarrel; because Mr. Owen had made it an habitual thought with us, that all our thoughts, feelings and actions are the effects of the causes that produce them, and that it would be just as rational to punish the fruit of a tree for being what it is, as to quarrel with each other for being what we are; that our true issues are not with each other, but with causes.

Many intelligent and far-seeing members had left, and others were preparing to leave, and an oppressive despondency hung heavily upon all. I shared the general feeling, and nothing saved me from despair but the idea that our business is with causes; and the question now was, what could be the causes of all this confusion and disappointment? What was the matter, when all were so willing to sacrifice so much for success? These questions led my thoughts back to our difficulties in detail. The first constitution bound every one to give his best services for the general good of the society; but we could not agree as to what would best promote this general good, and the more we talked and argued, the more we disagreed.

That phrase, “the general good,” is a harmless and useful one, providing there is no necessity of agreeing as to its meaning. Why was it necessary to agree as to its signification? The necessity evidently arose out of our connected interests. If each one interpreted the word only for himself, the great diversity of views would not only have been harmless but might have been profitable; but in communism, some one view must prevail over all. Communism, then, was the root of the trouble here. The constitution also required every one to be industrious, but the word industrious is an indefinite one, and like all other indefinite words is subject to different interpretations. The teacher of music was busy all the school hours, week after week with the children, and in many of the evenings, teaching the use of instruments; suffering torture (of ear) all the time, and craved above all things to have rest in something to do out of doors, in the sun-light and air; but he thought he must be industrious for the good of the whole; while at the same time, the out-door workers raised a cry that this man’s teaching was not at all necessary, they demanded that he should go about some industrious pursuit! So differently do we see, feel and think, according to our circumstances and experiences, and so incapable are we of judging and deciding for each other; and consequently are not adopted to live in communism, where there is no freedom to differ, but all must conform to some one idea or view of each subject as it arises.

The demand in the constitution for equality, gave rise to the demand of the clown for a chance at the good things in the public house. The idea of entertaining strangers, who came to enquire into the philosophy of our movement, was no part of his programme.

That word, Equality, is a very useful word, in some places; but in a constitution, binding on all, anti subject to as many different meanings as there are people to use, it can produce only the severest and bitterest of fruits. The case of the sick woman arose from the same source, the indefiniteness of the word Equality. On this ground they demanded her presence in the kitchen, when she was not able to sit up half the time. These women did not know her condition, but thought they did. This mistake, which made a wide breach between the parties, would have been entirely harmless, had it not been for communism, and the constitution.

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

Article IX

“Some facts are more strange than fiction, more philosophical than philosophy, more romantic than romance, and more conservative than conservatism.”

In our educational department there was a gentleman of whom I was very fond, who took to going about the streets without any hat, and allowing his beard to grow to such an extent that, together with the effect of the sun on his fine skin made him look frightfully repulsive, somewhat like an ourang outang. Fearing that his appearance would give character to the schools (in which he was one of the teachers) and disgust strangers, I ventured to say to him as gently as I could, what I thought, that I was afraid that as strangers could only judge at first of our enterprise by externals, would it not be best to forego for the present unimportant peculiarities for the sake of getting the attention of the public for whose benefit we were working?

“My God!” he exclaimed, have I come three thousand miles over the Atlantic Ocean in pursuit of freedom to be dictated to how I shall dress!” I could say not another word, our friendship was broken up and was never renewed, for he soon left the place.

Now, what was the matter here? It was Communism that was the matter. He and I both belonged to the same (educational) department; and I was not willing to bear any portion of the reputation that the school was likely to get, nor to have it suffer defeat without an effort to save it. In our connection we could not both of us have our different ways; the liberty he desired was impossible if I had my way, or mine was impossible if he had his; but if each of us had conducted a school individually there would have been freedom to differ without disturbance.

Another case. Passing by the blacksmith’s shop, I saw him sitting on the bench talking, as he was in the habit of doing a large portion of the time. On my return, in about a half an hour, he still sat there, swinging his legs and talking as usual. I had business with him, and stepped in. Just then a young woman was passing over the green at a little distance. “There,” said he; “now what is she there for, wasting her time; she had much better be in the straw room at work, than gadding about at that rate.” Neither he nor I knew who the lady was, nor where she was going, nor what she was going for. I was shocked and disgusted at the rough impertinence of the criticism upon the young lady, and asked myself the question: What could possibly justify him in his own opinion for wild brutality? and I perceived that it was communism. He would probably say that having a joint interest in results, he had a right to look at and criticise any member’s movements; and in communisms this could not be disputed and for the same reason I should criticise the position in which he had been for the last half hour, and where would quarreling end? It could end in nothing short of individualizing our interests—the abandonment of Communism.

My thoughts went back to many more instances similar to these, and in every case I could come to no other conclusion than that Communism was the matter, and that it was false and wrong in principle.

What, then, was to be done? Must we give up all hope of successful society? Or must we attempt to construct society without Communism?—for all societies, from a nation to the smallest partnership, are more or less communistic.

We had carried Communism farther than usual, and hence our greater than ordinary confusion. Common society, then, had all the time been right in its individual ownership of property, and its individual responsibilities and wrong in all its communistic entanglements!

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

Article X

Some facts are “more strange than fiction,” more philosophical than philosophy, more romantic than romance, and more conservative than conservatism.

Had society, then, started wrong at the beginning? Had all its governments and other communistic institutions been formed on a wrong model? Was disintegration, then, not an enemy but a friend and a remedy? Was individuality to be the watchword in harmonic progress, instead of Union? I dwelt upon these thoughts day and night, for I could not dismiss them, and was almost bewildered with the immense scope of the subject and the astounding conclusions that I could not avoid; but I had become so distrustful of my own judgment from our late disappointments, I resolved to dismiss these thoughts and these great problems to be solved by the wise, the “great” and the powerful; but I could not dismiss them. They haunted me day and night; they presented to me society beginning anew; I found myself asking how it should begin. It could not be formed or formulized, for we had just proved that we could no more form successful society than we form the fruit upon a tree. It must be the natural growth of the interest that each one feels in it from the benefits derived or expected from it. The greater these benefits, the stronger is the “bond of society;” where there is no interest felt there is no “bond of society,” whatever its “unions,” its organizations, its constitutions, governments or laws may be.

We had just seen that no bond could be stronger than that which bound us together till we commenced “organizing” and making laws, rules, regulations and governments. There was now no interest felt in the enterprise, no “bond,” no society; but we were scattering as rapidly as possible, never, perhaps, to see each other again.

If the enjoyments derived from society are its true bond, what do we want of any other bond? “Oh, we want governments and laws to regulate the movements of the members of society—to prevent their encroachments on each other, and to manage the combined (communistic) interests for the common benefit.”

But the movements of members have never been regulated; encroachments have not only not been prevented by laws and governments, but they have always proved the greatest of all encroachers and disturbers. Encroachments are increasing every day, the common interests have never been managed to the satisfaction of the parties interested, and there is no agreement among us as to what would best promote the common interest or what measures to adopt to that end. It was precisely these problems that remained to be solved which was our purpose in our late movement. It had been defeated by our attempts to govern each other, to regulate each other for the common benefit, the good of society, no two having the same view of the best way of Promoting the good of society, and no one retaining the same view from one week to another. We had not arrived at principles, and infinite diversity with regard to measures and modes was inevitable in the transitionary stage. If we could fortunately arrive at principles, they would become our regulators, perhaps.

J. Warren

Article XI

Infinite diversity instead of “unity” is inevitable[2], especially in the progressive or transitional stage. Then why not leave every one to regulate his own movements, within equitable limits, provided we can find out what equity is, and leave the rest to the universal instinct of self-preservation? But what constitutes equity is the greatest question of all. It is the “unknown quantity” that even algebra has failed to furnish! One thing may be depended on. If all our wants are supplied that is all we want. Could we not supply each other’s wants without “entangling” ourselves in Communism, and thereby involving ourselves in interminable conflicts and fruitless legislation? Could we not have a central point in each neighborhood where all wants might be made known, and where those wanting employment or who might have anything to dispose of could also make it known, and thus bring the demand and the supply together and adopt the one to the other? But on what principle could we exchange, so that each and every one could get as much as he gave? Here the idea of labor for labor (first broached in Europe) presented itself; but hour for hour, in all pursuits, did not seem to promise the equilibrium required, because starved, ragged, insulted and suffering labor would be shunned even more than it is now by every one who could avoid it; and the more respected and more agreeable pursuits would be overcrowded, and conflict between all would continue, and the demand and supply would be thrown out of balance; but as no one would be bound to follow any theory any farther than it best suited him, every one could make any exceptions to the rule that he might choose to make.

Estimating the price of everything by the labor there is in it, promised to abolish all speculations on land on clothing, food, fuel, knowledge—on every thing—to convert time into capital, thereby abolishing the distinctions of rich and poor; to reduce the amount of necessary labor to two or three hours per day, where no one would desire to avoid his share of useful employment. The motive of some to force others to bear their burthens would not exist, and slaveries of all kinds would naturally become extinct.

J. Warren
Princeton, Mass.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



Josiah Warren

The Motives for Communism

How It Worked and What It Led To

1872-73

Retrieved on 13 June 2019 from <https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/equitable-commerce/josiah-warren-the-motives-for-communism-and-what-it-led-to/>

Published in eleven parts in *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* from February 17, 1872 to April 26, 1873. In Article VI (mistakenly subtitled as "IV" again in the original), there appears to be a marked footnote after "the middle of May", but no actual footnote, so it has been ignored. A footnote appears for Article XI, though no mark for it is present in the text, so I have inserted it where it seemed appropriate. Article X is simply signed "J. Warren", without the second line of "Princeton, Mass."

usa.anarchistlibraries.net